

J.C.WELLS

# Accents of English 1

---

## An Introduction



# Accents of English I

---

## An Introduction

J. C. WELLS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1982

First published 1982

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 81-10127

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

Wells, J. C.

Accents of English.

.1: An introduction

1. English language – Pronunciation

I. Title

421.5'2 PE1137

ISBN 0 521 22919 7 hard covers Volume 1

ISBN 0 521 29719 2 paperback Volume 1

ISBN 0 521 24224 X hard covers Volume 2

ISBN 0 521 28540 2 paperback Volume 2

ISBN 0 521 24225 8 hard covers Volume 3

ISBN 0 521 28541 0 paperback Volume 3

To the memory of my father,  
Philip Wells (1909–1974),  
who encouraged me



# Preface

I believe that the three volumes of *Accents of English* represent the first attempt ever to offer a reasonably comprehensive account of the pronunciation of English in all its native-speaker varieties.

I have of course exploited my own familiarity with the various accents – such as it is, varying in depth in accordance with the varying exposure to them which life has happened to give me. These biases will no doubt be apparent. But I have also endeavoured to make appropriate use of all kinds of scholarly treatments of particular regional forms of speech, wherever they have been available to me and to whatever tradition they belong (philological, dialectological, structuralist, ‘speech’, generativist, sociolinguistic, variationist). My aim has been to bring together their principal findings within a unified and integrated framework.

My own descriptive standpoint, as will be seen, lies within the University College London ‘phonetic’ tradition of Daniel Jones, A. C. Gimson, and J. D. O’Connor. I am fortunate to have been their pupil. This standpoint could be said to involve an eclectic amalgam of what seems valuable from both older and newer theoretical approaches.

Where surveys based on substantial fieldwork exist, I have made use of their findings. Where they do not, I have had to rely partly on my own impressions. The reader must bear in mind that some of the statements I make are for this reason necessarily tentative.

Inevitably I may be laying myself open to the charge of rushing in where angels fear to tread. Many readers will know more about the socially sensitive pronunciation variables of their home areas than I can hope to. The Rotherham native will look here in vain for a discussion of the features which distinguish his speech from that of Sheffield a few miles away – features obvious to the native, but opaque to the outsider (1.1.4 below). There is a great deal of descriptive work remaining to be done.

I see the original contribution of these volumes as lying princi-

## *Preface*

pally in the following areas: (i) the description of certain neglected accents, including certain accents of the British Isles and the West Indies; (ii) the identification and naming of a number of phonological processes, both historical and synchronic; (iii) the bringing together into a single descriptive framework of accounts by scholars working in many different places and in many different traditions.

Many people have helped me through discussion or correspondence, and in some instances by reading parts of the manuscript. In this regard I would mention particularly D. Abercrombie, K. Albrow, C.-J. N. Bailey, A. Bliss, N. Copeland, R. Easton, A. C. Gimson, T. Hackman, J. Harris, S. Hutcheson, L. Lanham, R. Lass, F. MacEinrí, J. D. McClure, J. Milroy, J. D. O'Connor, H. Paddock, S. M. Ramsaran, H.-H. Speitel, P. Trudgill and J. Windsor Lewis. Our views do not always coincide, nor have I accepted all their suggestions; responsibility for the facts and opinions here presented remains mine. I am aware that these are far from the last word on the subject. For any shortcomings I beg indulgence on the grounds that something, however inadequate, is better than nothing.

I am also grateful to J. L. M. Trim for first suggesting that I write this work, and to G. F. Arnold and O. M. Tooley – not to mention Cambridge University Press – for enquiring so assiduously after its tardy progress.

*London, January 1981*

JOHN WELLS

# Typographical conventions and phonetic symbols

Examples of pronunciation are set in *italics* if in ordinary spelling, otherwise in / / or [ ]. Sometimes methods are combined, thus *disapp[ɪə]rance* (which draws attention to the quality of the diphthong corresponding to orthographic *ea* in this word).

/ / is used for **phonemic** transcriptions: for representations believed to be analogous to the way pronunciations are stored in the mental lexicon (= underlying phonological representations); for transcriptions in which only significant sound units (phonemes) are notated.

[ ] is used for **allophonic** transcriptions: for representations believed to include more phonetic detail than is stored mentally (= surface phonetic representations); for transcriptions involving the notation of certain non-significant phoneme variants (allophones); also for **general-phonetic** or **impressionistic** notation of unanalysed data.

Note that symbols enclosed in [ ] are only selectively 'narrowed'. Thus on occasion [r] is used to stand for the ordinary English voiced post-alveolar approximant, more precisely written as [ɹ]; similarly [i] or [i:] may sometimes stand for [ɪ], etc. But where the quality of /r/ or /i(:)/ is the topic under discussion, then the precise symbols are employed.

Phonetic symbols are taken from the International Phonetic Alphabet (see chart, p. xx). The following additional symbols are employed:

- ʒ r-coloured ʒ
- ω unrounded u
- L voiced velar lateral
- C<sup>~</sup> unreleased C
- C<sup>=</sup> unaspirated C
- C any consonant

## *Typographical conventions and phonetic symbols*

V	any vowel
→	goes to, becomes, is realized as
~	or
\$ } .	syllable boundary (indicated only when relevant)
#	stem boundary, word boundary
	sentence boundary, end of utterance
Ø	zero
/	in the environment:
X → Y / A — B    X becomes Y in the environment of a preceding A and a following B, i.e. AXB → AYB.	

### **Words written in capitals**

Throughout the work, use is made of the concept of **standard lexical sets**. These enable one to refer concisely to large groups of words which tend to share the same vowel, and to the vowel which they share. They are based on the vowel correspondences which apply between British Received Pronunciation and (a variety of) General American, and make use of **keywords** intended to be unmistakable no matter what accent one says them in. Thus 'the KIT words' refers to 'ship, bridge, milk . . .'; 'the KIT vowel' refers to the vowel these words have (in most accents, /ɪ/); both may just be referred to as KIT.

#### RP    GenAm

ɪ	ɪ	1. KIT	ship, sick, bridge, milk, myth, busy . . .
e	ɛ	2. DRESS	step, neck, edge, shelf, friend, ready . . .
æ	æ	3. TRAP	tap, back, badge, scalp, hand, cancel . . .
ɒ	ɑ	4. LOT	stop, sock, dodge, romp, possible, quality . . .
ʌ	ʌ	5. STRUT	cup, suck, budge, pulse, trunk, blood . . .
ʊ	ʊ	6. FOOT	put, bush, full, good, look, wolf . . .
ɑː	æ	7. BATH	staff, brass, ask, dance, sample, calf . . .
ɒ	ɔ	8. CLOTH	cough, broth, cross, long, Boston . . .



*Typographical conventions and phonetic symbols*

ɜː	ɜr	9. NURSE	hurt, lurk, urge, burst, jerk, term . . .
ɪː	i	10. FLEECE	creep, speak, leave, feel, key, people . . .
eɪ	eɪ	11. FACE	tape, cake, raid, veil, steak, day . . .
ɑː	ɑ	12. PALM	psalm, father, bra, spa, lager . . .
ɔː	ɔ	13. THOUGHT	taught, sauce, hawk, jaw, broad . . .
əʊ	o	14. GOAT	soap, joke, home, know, so, roll . . .
uː	u	15. GOOSE	loop, shoot, tomb, mute, huge, view . . .
aɪ	aɪ	16. PRICE	ripe, write, arrive, high, try, buy . . .
ɔɪ	ɔɪ	17. CHOICE	adroit, noise, join, toy, royal . . .
aʊ	aʊ	18. MOUTH	out, house, loud, count, crowd, cow . . .
ɪə	ɪ(r	19. NEAR	beer, sincere, fear, beard, serum . . .
ɛə	ɛ(r	20. SQUARE	care, fair, pear, where, scarce, vary . . .
ɑː	ɑ(r	21. START	far, sharp, bark, carve, farm, heart . . .
ɔː	ɔ(r	22. NORTH	for, war, short, scorch, born, warm . . .
ɔː	o(r	23. FORCE	four, wore, sport, porch, borne, story . . .
ʊə	ʊ(r	24. CURE	poor, tourist, pure, plural, jury . . .

# THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET

(Revised to 1979)

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental, Alveolar, or Post-alveolar	Palato- alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Labial- Palatal	Labial- Velar	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Nasal	m	ɱ	n		p	ŋ	ɴ				
Plosive	p b		t d		c j	k g	q ɢ		ᵑ ᵔ		ʔ
(Median) Fricative	f β	v	θ ð s z	ʃ ʒ	j	x y	χ ʁ		ʙ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
(Median) Approximant		ʋ	ɹ		j	ɰ		ɥ	w		
Lateral Fricative			ɬ ɮ								
Lateral (Approximant)			l		ʎ						
Trill			r				ʀ				
Tap or Flap			ɾ				ɽ				
Ejective	p'		t'			k'					
Implosive	ɓ		d'			ɡ					
(Median) Click	ɘ		ɠ								
Lateral Click			ɡ								

## DIACRITICS

- Voiceless p t
- Voiced b d
- Aspirated tʰ
- Breathy-voiced b̤ d̤
- Dental t̪
- Labialized t̪
- Palatalized t̟
- Velarized or Pharyn-  
gealized t̠ t̡
- Syllabic p m
- or Simultaneous sʃ (but see  
also under the heading  
Affricates)

## OTHER SYMBOLS

. or . Raised e, ē, e w  
 , or , Lowered e, ē, e w  
 + Advanced u, u  
 - or - Retracted i, i, i  
 .. Centralized ē  
 - Nasalized ā  
 i, i, r-coloured a<sup>1</sup>  
 : Long a:  
 . Half-long a'  
 ~ Non-syllabic ū  
 , More rounded ɔ  
 , Less rounded y<sup>c</sup>

**STRESS, TONE (PITCH)**

' stress, placed at beginning of stressed syllable :  
' secondary stress : ~ high level pitch, high tone :  
~ low level : ' high rising :  
, low rising : ' high falling :  
, low falling : ^ rise-fall :  
, ^ fall-rise.

**AFFRICATES** can be written as digraphs, as ligatures, or with slur marks; thus ts, tʃ, dʒ: tʃ dʒ: ts tʃ dʒ.

[illegible]

## Unrounded

## Rounded

# Contents

## Volume 1: An Introduction

<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Typographical conventions and phonetic symbols</i>	xvii
<b>1 Aspects of accent</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>1.1 Linguistic and social variability</b>	<b>I</b>
1.1.1 Introduction	I
1.1.2 Dialect and accent	2
1.1.3 Traditional-dialect	4
1.1.4 Geographical variation	8
1.1.5 Socio-economic class	13
1.1.6 Sex, ethnicity	18
1.1.7 Age: the time dimension	23
1.1.8 Styles and rôles	25
1.1.9 Perceiving a stereotype	28
1.1.10 Projecting an image	31
1.1.11 Standards	34
1.1.12 What are the facts?	36
<b>1.2 Accent phonology</b>	<b>39</b>
1.2.1 Why phonology?	39
1.2.2 The taxonomic-phonemic model	41
1.2.3 Phonetic similarity	44
1.2.4 Non-contrastive distribution	45
1.2.5 Affricates and diphthongs	48
1.2.6 The phonological word	50
1.2.7 Multiple complementation and neutralization	52
1.2.8 Further difficulties with taxonomic phonemics	54
1.2.9 Phonological rules	57
1.2.10 Natural classes	59
1.2.11 A case in point: the velar nasal	60
1.2.12 Optional rules, variable rules	64
1.2.13 Rule ordering	66
1.2.14 Polylectal and panlectal phonology	69
<b>1.3 How accents differ</b>	<b>72</b>
1.3.1 Introduction	72
1.3.2 Phonetic realization	73

## *Contents*

1.3.3	Phonotactic distribution	75
1.3.4	Phonemic systems	76
1.3.5	Lexical distribution	78
1.3.6	Further considerations	80
1.3.7	Consequences: rhymes, puns, and intelligibility	81
1.3.8	Rhythmical characteristics	86
1.3.9	Intonation	89
1.3.10	Voice quality	91
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Why accents differ</b>	<b>93</b>
1.4.1	Why innovations arise	93
1.4.2	System preservation	97
1.4.3	Splits and mergers	99
1.4.4	Regularization	101
1.4.5	Why innovations spread	103
1.4.6	The influence of literacy	106
1.4.7	External influences	110
1.4.8	Altering one's accent	111
<b>2</b>	<b>Sets and systems</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>The reference accents</b>	<b>117</b>
2.1.1	Introduction	117
2.1.2	The vowel system of RP	118
2.1.3	The vowel system of GenAm	120
2.1.4	The two vowel systems compared	122
2.1.5	RP and GenAm: further comparison	124
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Standard lexical sets</b>	<b>127</b>
2.2.1	KIT	127
2.2.2	DRESS	128
2.2.3	TRAP	129
2.2.4	LOT	130
2.2.5	STRUT	131
2.2.6	FOOT	132
2.2.7	BATH	133
2.2.8	CLOTH	136
2.2.9	NURSE	137
2.2.10	FLEECE	140
2.2.11	FACE	141
2.2.12	PALM	142
2.2.13	THOUGHT	144
2.2.14	GOAT	146
2.2.15	GOOSE	147
2.2.16	PRICE	149
2.2.17	CHOICE	150
2.2.18	MOUTH	151
2.2.19	NEAR	153

2.2.20	SQUARE	155
2.2.21	START	157
2.2.22	NORTH	159
2.2.23	FORCE	160
2.2.24	CURE	162
2.2.25	Weak vowels: <i>happy</i> , <i>letter</i> , <i>comma</i>	165
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Systems; a typology</b>	<b>168</b>
2.3.1	Part-system A	168
2.3.2	Part-system B	171
2.3.3	Part-system C	173
2.3.4	Part-system D	175
2.3.5	The consonant system	178
2.3.6	A typology for accents of English	181
<b>3</b>	<b>Developments and processes</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Residualisms</b>	<b>184</b>
3.1.1	The Great Vowel Shift	184
3.1.2	NG Coalescence	188
3.1.3	The velar fricative	189
3.1.4	THOUGHT Monophthonging	191
3.1.5	The Long Mid Mergers	192
3.1.6	The FLEECE Merger	194
3.1.7	The FOOT-STRUT Split	196
3.1.8	The NURSE Merger	199
3.1.9	Pre-Fricative Lengthening	203
3.1.10	Yod Dropping	206
3.1.11	PRICE and CHOICE	208
3.1.12	Long Mid Diphthonging	210
3.1.13	The Great Divide	211
<b>3.2</b>	<b>British prestige innovations</b>	<b>212</b>
3.2.1	Vowels before /r/	213
3.2.2	R Dropping	218
3.2.3	R Insertion	222
3.2.4	Glide Cluster Reduction	228
3.2.5	Suffix vowels	231
3.2.6	BATH and CLOTH	232
3.2.7	The FORCE Mergers	234
3.2.8	The realization of GOAT	237
3.2.9	Smoothing	238
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Some American innovations</b>	<b>242</b>
3.3.1	Vowels before /r/	242
3.3.2	LOT Unrounding; loss of distinctive length	245
3.3.3	Later Yod Dropping	247
3.3.4	Tapping and T Voicing	248



## Contents

<b>3.4 Some further British innovations</b>	<b>252</b>
3.4.1 H Dropping	253
3.4.2 Diphthong Shift	256
3.4.3 <i>Happy</i> Tensing	257
3.4.4 L Vocalization	258
3.4.5 Glottalization	260
3.4.6 The <i>-ing</i> variable	262
<i>Sources and further reading</i>	264
<i>References</i>	265
<i>Index</i>	271

## Volume 2: The British Isles

<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Typographical conventions and phonetic symbols</i>	xvii
<b>4 England</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>4.1 RP revisited</b>	<b>279</b>
4.1.1 Varieties of RP	279
4.1.2 U-RP	280
4.1.3 Adoptive RP	283
4.1.4 Variability in mainstream RP	285
4.1.5 RP: systemic variability	287
4.1.6 RP: distributional variability	289
4.1.7 RP: realizational variability	291
4.1.8 RP: lexical-incidental variability	295
4.1.9 Near-RP	297
<b>4.2 London</b>	<b>301</b>
4.2.1 Introduction	301
4.2.2 The vowel system	303
4.2.3 Monophthongs and centring diphthongs	305
4.2.4 The Diphthong Shift	306
4.2.5 The THOUGHT Split	310
4.2.6 The GOAT Split	312
4.2.7 Vowel plus /l/	313
4.2.8 Further remarks on vowels	317
4.2.9 The consonant system; [h]	321
4.2.10 Plosives: affrication, glottalling, tapping	322
4.2.11 Glottalling of other consonants	327
4.2.12 Fricatives	328
4.2.13 Yod phenomena	330
4.2.14 Prosodic features	331
4.2.15 Literary Cockney	332
<b>4.3 The south</b>	<b>335</b>
4.3.1 Introduction	335

4.3.2	East Anglia: vowels	337
4.3.3	The Norwich vowel system	340
4.3.4	East Anglia: consonants and prosodic features	341
4.3.5	The west country: rhoticity and its consequences	341
4.3.6	The west country: other consonants	343
4.3.7	The west country: vowels	345
4.3.8	The Bristol vowel system	348
<b>4.4</b>	<b>The north</b>	<b>349</b>
4.4.1	Introduction	349
4.4.2	The STRUT words	351
4.4.3	The BATH words	353
4.4.4	Other vowels	356
4.4.5	Two vowel systems	363
4.4.6	Velar nasal plus	365
4.4.7	Yorkshire Assimilation	366
4.4.8	The consonant /r/	367
4.4.9	Other consonants	370
4.4.10	Merseyside	371
4.4.11	Tyneside	374
<b>5</b>	<b>The Celtic countries</b>	<b>377</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>377</b>
5.1.1	Introduction	377
5.1.2	Rhoticity	378
5.1.3	A typical vowel system	380
5.1.4	Five possible extra contrasts	384
5.1.5	Further remarks on vowels	386
5.1.6	Consonants	387
5.1.7	Connected-speech variants	391
5.1.8	Prosodic features	391
5.1.9	Sociolinguistics in Cardiff	392
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>393</b>
5.2.1	Introduction	393
5.2.2	Scots	395
5.2.3	Monophthongs	399
5.2.4	Diphthongs	405
5.2.5	Vowels before /r/	407
5.2.6	Consonants	408
5.2.7	The Highlands and Islands	412
5.2.8	Prosodic features	414
5.2.9	Sociolinguistic studies	415
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>417</b>
5.3.1	Introduction	417
5.3.2	The vowel system	418

## Contents

5.3.3	Vowels before /r/	420
5.3.4	Short vowels	421
5.3.5	Long vowels	424
5.3.6	Diphthongs	425
5.3.7	Weak vowels	427
5.3.8	Alveolar and dental stops	428
5.3.9	The liquids	431
5.3.10	Other consonants	432
5.3.11	Processes	434
5.3.12	Prosodic features	436
5.3.13	The north: introduction	436
5.3.14	The north: vowel system and vowel length	438
5.3.15	The north: vowel quality	440
5.3.16	The north: consonants	445
5.3.17	The north: processes	447
5.3.18	The north: intonation	447
5.3.19	The north: accent and dialect	448
5.3.20	Summary	449
	<i>Sources and further reading</i>	451
	<i>References</i>	453
	<i>Index</i>	462

## Volume 3: Beyond the British Isles

	<i>Preface</i>	xv
	<i>Typographical conventions and phonetic symbols</i>	xvii
<b>6</b>	<b>North America</b>	467
<b>6.1</b>	<b>GenAm revisited</b>	467
6.1.1	Introduction	467
6.1.2	The THOUGHT-LOT Merger	473
6.1.3	Further issues relating to THOUGHT and LOT	475
6.1.4	BATH Raising	477
6.1.5	Vowels before /r/	479
6.1.6	Other vowels	485
6.1.7	Consonants	488
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Canada</b>	490
6.2.1	Introduction	490
6.2.2	The vowel system	492
6.2.3	The open back vowel(s)	493
6.2.4	PRICE, MOUTH Raising	494
6.2.5	Consonants	495
6.2.6	Questions of incidence	496
6.2.7	Newfoundland: general	498
6.2.8	Newfoundland: vowels	498
6.2.9	Newfoundland: consonants	500

<b>6.3 New York City</b>	501
6.3.1 Introduction	501
6.3.2 The vowel system	503
6.3.3 Variable non-rhoticity and its consequences	505
6.3.4 NURSE and CHOICE	508
6.3.5 BATH Raising	510
6.3.6 CLOTH-THOUGHT Raising	513
6.3.7 LOT Lengthening	514
6.3.8 Alveolars and dentals	515
6.3.9 Other consonants	517
<b>6.4 New England</b>	518
6.4.1 Introduction	518
6.4.2 Non-rhoticity	520
6.4.3 The open front vowel area	522
6.4.4 The open back vowel area	524
6.4.5 The New England 'short o'	525
6.4.6 PRICE and MOUTH	526
<b>6.5 The south</b>	527
6.5.1 Introduction	527
6.5.2 The vowel system	530
6.5.3 The lax vowels	533
6.5.4 PRICE and MOUTH	537
6.5.5 Other vowels	539
6.5.6 Vowel plus nasal	540
6.5.7 Is southern speech non-rhotic?	542
6.5.8 Vowel plus /r/	545
6.5.9 Vowel plus /l/	550
6.5.10 Weak vowels	551
6.5.11 Consonants	552
<b>6.6 Black English</b>	553
6.6.1 Introduction	553
6.6.2 Phonetic characteristics	556
<b>7 The West Indies</b>	560
<b>7.1 General characteristics of Caribbean English</b>	560
7.1.1 Introduction	560
7.1.2 Creole	562
7.1.3 TH Stopping	565
7.1.4 Cluster reduction	566
7.1.5 Other consonants	567
7.1.6 Vowels and /r/	570
7.1.7 Prosodic features	572
<b>7.2 Individual territories</b>	574
7.2.1 Jamaica	574
7.2.2 Trinidad	577